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J. B. PICK

The Work of David Lindsay

Writers, generally speaking, are only writers. They write not primarily because they have anything to say but because for one reason or another they want to write. Once a man has begun his book, if he has anything in him it will come out. If he hasn't much in him, and realises it, he will strike an attitude to disguise the fact. The attitude may take the form of "stylistic originality" or something of that sort, which the literati, who are easily deceived, may well admire.

It is no wonder that David Lindsay was never found generally acceptable. He had actually *seen* something, and his masterpiece *A Voyage to Arcturus* is a vivid account of the vision. We require from a witness not a display of educated sensibility but an account of what happened, and this is what David Lindsay gives us. The literati have often proved to prefer a display of educated sensibility. If nothing important has happened, to display educated sensibility is the only possible reason for only giving an account at all.

David Lindsay's tragedy—and his literary life was really that—is the tragedy of a man who has seen something, tells people and they don't listen or don't understand what he is talking about.

Lindsay had worked as a Lloyd's underwriter for fifteen years before he wrote his first novel. During this time he had filled notebooks with observations, reflections, perceptions and aphorisms, which all slanted in one direction and culminated in the explosive vision which became *A Voyage to Arcturus*, as soon as he left his job and settled in Cornwall to write. The book sold only a few hundred copies and its reception is typified by a review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, dated September 30th 1920:

There may be an intention of allegory in what appears to be simply a riot of morbid fancy; but we doubt whether many readers will be inclined to pursue the possible hidden meaning over a quagmire and through a noisome fog. For the book is, at any rate, consistent in respect of its uniform unwholesomeness; the keynote being struck in the opening chapter, which recalls Baudelaire, or Poe in his most grisly vein. It is, no doubt, a legitimate aim of the

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writer of fiction to make the flesh creep; scarcely, we think, to make the gorge rise.

The book is nothing whatever like Baudelaire or Poe, in whatever vein they may be writing, but the reviewer had several detective novels to deal with and no time for reflection. *Arcturus* was not reissued until 1945 and by that time David Lindsay was dead.

Lindsay, a strong, reserved man of Scottish Calvinist background, a solitary walker, a mountaineer, devoted to German metaphysics and to music, was not primarily an artist. He was concerned ruthlessly with his vision of truth, with his bitter and profound experience of spiritual reality. Panawe, the artist in *A Voyage to Arcturus*, says: "Nothing comes of it [art] but vanity."¹ In his notebook Lindsay writes: "The first preliminary for all metaphysical thinking is to produce within oneself the sense of *reality*."² Lindsay had this sense; he did not need to "produce it within himself."

If the reality behind his vision had been acknowledged on the appearance of *Arcturus*, perhaps his grip upon our human life here on earth would not have weakened so sadly in his later work. *Arcturus* proved too weird and strange both for critics and public.

No wonder. Its keywords are "wildness" and "grandeur." Its impact is powerful, its message at the same time tonic and terrible. The book is *there*, as a whole, violent and compelling. It is not anything so crude as an allegory, it is an imaginative fire in which years of thought are burned up. In *Devil's Tor* the painter says: "A symbol is a mystic sign of the Creator. An allegory is a wall decoration with a label attached."³ *A Voyage to Arcturus* is no wall decoration.

Later books needed "composing" from scraps of discontinuous perception, from ideas and observations. None has the singleness of *Arcturus*, none gives the same impression of overwhelming, unified power. The "story" is often forced, and has insufficient means of locomotion. Lindsay in some of the books seems like a lithe, muscular man in a very ill-fitting suit. The savagery has gone, the grandeur is more abstract and the "sublimity" seems more deliberately sought.

In *Arcturus* the wildness is naked. Pleasure and pain are seen contemptuously as vulgar and trivial. Krag "made a careless and almost

¹ *A Voyage to Arcturus* (London, 1946), p.60. First published London, 1920. All quotations from 1946 edition.

² From typescript of "Sketch Notes for a New System of Philosophy," unpublished.

³ *Devil's Tor* (London, 1932), p.145.

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savage slash at Maskull's upper arm."⁴ Maskull "scowls with pain." Such phrases are common.

The book begins as if Lindsay intends to set his story in the here and now. He introduces a set of characters who assemble for a seance. They are all fully described, as though they were the chief runners in a marathon. In fact they disappear like bubbles on a stream and never return after the first chapter. Two rough, wild strangers, Maskull "a kind of giant, but of broader and robuster physique than most giants,"⁵ and Nightspore, "of middle height, but so tough looking that he appeared as if trained out of all human susceptibilities" enter the house just when the medium is about to conduct a materialisation. The medium succeeds in producing a beautiful, supernatural youth. A thick, muscular, ugly, yellow-faced man with an expression of "sagacity, brutality and humour"⁶ bounds in and twists the youth's neck round. "A faint, unearthly shriek sounded, and the body fell in a heap on the floor. . . The guests were unutterably shocked to observe that its expression had changed from a mysterious but fascinating smile to a vulgar, sordid, bestial grin."⁷ So much for the wiles of Crystalman, the god of this world.

From that moment everything is vision, and only occasionally does deliberate invention intrude. The story of Maskull's pilgrimage pulses and flows. The savage latecomer, Krag, who is in fact an emissary of Muspel, the hidden eternal light, and who on earth takes on the aspect of redemptive Pain, draws Maskull and Nightspore aside and persuades them to accompany him on a voyage to Tormance, one of the planets of the star Arcturus. They set off in a space-ship from the top of a high tower in Caithness. Although the means of rocket propulsion is more interesting than it would be in most space-fiction writers, what a space-fiction writer would concentrate on, Lindsay ignores, and the journey is not described.

My guess is that the characters assembled for the seance were to have been the leading figures in a novel of the same oddly polite, disturbing kind as the later *Sphinx* and *Violet Apple*, but at the point of Krag's entry, the vision exploded in a huge pattern of light, the novel disappeared, and an extravagant masterpiece took its place. From then on the tale drives forward with reckless directness.

Despite the metaphysical intention, everything is concrete. We start from fruits and colours, not from abstractions. The nature of a fruit

⁴ *A Voyage*, p.40.

⁵ *A Voyage*, p.20.

⁶ *A Voyage*, p.23.

⁷ *A Voyage*, p.24.

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unknown on earth is "hard, persistent, melancholy."⁸ The nature of colours unknown on earth are described like this: "Just as blue is delicate and mysterious, yellow, clear and unsubtle, so he felt ulfire to be wild and painful, and jale dreamlike, feverish and voluptuous."⁹ The imagery, often drawn from music, is burning and impressive. The descriptions have tremendous imaginative force, and a vivid hallucinatory quality. Lindsay uses words violently, sometimes uncouthly, is occasionally ponderous, and cares nothing for grace. "He [Maskull] was a naked stranger in a huge, foreign, mystical world, and whichever way he turned unknown and threatening forces were glaring at him. The gigantic, white, withering Branchspell, the awful, body-changing Alppain, the beautiful, treacherous sea, the dark and eerie Swaylone's island, the spirit-crushing forest from which he had just escaped. . . ."¹⁰ This is the world of the book, which at a first reading has an effect similar to that of certain Tormance music on Maskull: "Maskull felt that something important was about to be uttered, which would explain all that had gone before. But it was invariably postponed. . . and yet somehow he did understand."¹¹

Sometimes, when words have to be put into the mouths of the strange, living, symbolic figures, and the vision provides no words, he makes them up from what he knows—bald, direct and without the glow of vision. At other times their utterances have a gnomic, pithy conciseness and an aphoristic force which strike home to the heart: "If you wish to say what is *not*, many words will not suffice. If you wish to say what *is*, a few words will be enough,"¹² says Catice.

The tale itself is the account of Maskull's pilgrimage on Tormance, in search of Muspel, about which he knows nothing except that he seeks it. Maskull is a Prometheus figure who "came to steal Muspel-fire, to give a deeper life to men, never doubting if your soul could endure that burning." Krag and Nightspore desert him. He goes through a series of remarkable, violent, terrifying adventures in a world of extraordinary reality, led onwards towards Muspel by mysterious drumbeats. These drumbeats are indications that the other world of Muspel in truth exists. "The drum-beats. . . reminded him of some place and some life with which he was perfectly familiar. Once again they caused all his other sense-impressions to appear false."¹³

⁸ *A Voyage*, p.52.

⁹ *A Voyage*, p.51.

¹⁰ *A Voyage*, p.140.

¹¹ *A Voyage*, p.71.

¹² *A Voyage*, p.127.

¹³ *A Voyage*, p.133.

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Maskull is told nothing by the enigmatic Krag, but must find out everything for himself. At the very start he is warned. A voice tells him: "Nightspore is asleep now, but when he wakes you must die. You will go, but he will return."¹⁴

Maskull's nobility and daring make it possible for him to receive intimations that beyond this world there is another, which alone is real. But Maskull is human, and can be led in many directions. Nightspore is Maskull's "new man" who awakes only when Maskull, the everyday self, dies. The nature of the true god becomes revealed after terrible suffering, for the Devil is the God of this world and idealism, philosophy, pleasure, love are all the toys with which Crystalman deceives his victims. Most forms of mysticism, too, seek union only with Crystalman (or Shaping) and never realise the existence of the hidden Muspel. "This is Shaping's world," says Slofork. "He that is a good child here, knows pleasure, pain and love, and gets his rewards. But there is another world . . . not Shaping's . . . and there all this is unknown, and another order of things reigns . . ."¹⁵

Polecrab says: "I live by killing and so does everybody. This life seems to me all wrong. So maybe life of any kind is wrong, and Surtur's world is not life at all, but something else."¹⁶ In Lindsay's notebook occur the words: "In the Norse mythology, Muspel is the primeval world of fire; existing before heaven and earth, and which will eventually destroy them."¹⁷

When Maskull at last fights through the torments of this illusory world and reaches, with Krag, a great ocean, he is ill and dying.

"What is this Ocean called?" asked Maskull, bringing out the words with difficulty.

"Surtur's Ocean."

"Where's Nightspore?"

Krag bent over him with a grave expression.

"You are Nightspore . . ."

Shortly afterwards a frightful pang passed through Maskull's heart, and he died instantly.

Krag turned his head round. "The night is really gone at last, Nightspore . . . The day is here."

Nightspore gazed long and earnestly at Maskull's body.

"Why was all this necessary?"

"Ask Crystalman," replied Krag sternly. "His world is no joke. He has a strong clutch . . . but I have a stronger . . . Maskull was his, but Nightspore is mine . . ."

¹⁴ *A Voyage*, p.38.

¹⁵ *A Voyage*, p.67.

¹⁶ *A Voyage*, p.145.

¹⁷ "Sketch Notes."

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"Do all men escape from that ghastly world . . . or only I, and a few like me?"

"If all escaped, I shouldn't sweat, my friend."¹⁸

Nightspore reaches the Muspel tower. "All was dark and quiet as opened tomb. But the air was filled with grim, burning *passion*, which was to light and sound what light itself is to opaque colour . . ."¹⁹

When Nightspore ascends the Muspel tower he sees through an embrasure that light is streaming from the tower towards a luminous sphere, which is the world. Between the sphere and Muspel hangs a shadow. When the light passes through the shadow it is split.

What had been fiery spirit but a moment ago was now a disgusting mass of crawling, wriggling individuals, each whirl of pleasure-seeking will having, as nucleus, a fragmentary spark of living green fire . . . Sometimes the green sparks were strong enough . . . to move a little way in the direction of Muspel . . . but they never saw beyond the shadow, though they were travelling towards it.²⁰

The spirit-stream from Muspel passes through the Shadow, which is Crystalman, and the passage "caused him exquisite pleasure. *The Muspel stream was Crystalman's food*. Nightspore shuddered. He comprehended at last how the whole world of will was doomed to eternal anguish in order that one Being might feel joy."²¹

On the roof, expecting the final revelation, Nightspore sees—nothing. "Darkness was all around him . . . he had the distinct impression that the darkness . . . was *grinning* . . . he understood that he was wholly surrounded by Crystalman's world, and that Muspel consisted of himself and the stone tower on which he was sitting."²² He goes down to rebirth, to help Krag lead others toward the light.

Any description of the book must give an uncouth, bizarre impression, and this is not unjust. But what emerges after several readings is something quite other—a sense of the remarkable profundity and coherence of the vision and its message. The message is terrible in its uncompromising purity, and is more likely to repel casual readers than to attract. But the achievement of the book exactly balances the astonishing ambition of its intention. This, surely, is most exceptional.

After *A Voyage* Lindsay wrote at least seven books and published four. He never found again the ease of movement granted to him by his translation in *A Voyage* to another planet than ours. The other books

¹⁸ *A Voyage*, p.240.

¹⁹ *A Voyage*, p.242.

²⁰ *A Voyage*, p.245.

²¹ *A Voyage*, p.246.

²² *A Voyage*, p.247.

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have to live in this world of Sussex downs and drawing rooms. *The Haunted Woman* appears on the surface to be a story of intrigue. An engaged girl interested in buying an old house falls in love with a middle-aged man, its owner. But the movement of events is unusual. Isbel is not attracted to Judge in "normal" life, but only as the result of visits in his company to a part of the house which can only be reached by ascending a staircase which to most people and at most times simply isn't there. In the room where they eventually find themselves, people take on a new dimension, and become most deeply themselves.

It was not so much that she appeared more beautiful as that her face had acquired another character. Its expression was deep, stern, lowering, yet everything was softened and made alluring by the pervading presence of sexual sweetness... The face struck a note of deep, underlying passion, but a passion which was still asleep... It seemed to her that no woman possessing such a strong, terrible sweetness and intensity of character could avoid accepting an uncommon, perhaps a fearful destiny.²³

Underlying, threatening, exalting and intensifying their love, comes the music that in *The Haunted Woman* replaces the drumbeats of *Arc-turus*.

The low rich heavy scraping sound certainly did resemble that of a deep-toned string instrument, heard from a distance, but to Isbel's imagination, it resembled something else as well. She thought she recognized it as the music of that dark upstairs corridor, which she had heard on her first visit to the house. But this time it was ever so much nearer, fuller and more defined; the electric buzzing had resolved itself into perfectly distinct vibrations... A tune was being played, so there was no doubt about the nature of the noise. It was a simple, early-English rustic air — sweet, passionate and haunting. The sonorous and melancholy character of the instrument added a wild, long-drawn-out-charm to it which was altogether beyond the range of the understanding and seemed to belong to other days, when feelings were more poignant and delicate, less showy, splendid and odourless... After the theme had been repeated once, from beginning to end, the performance ceased, and was succeeded by absolute stillness.²⁴

Each visit to the strange wing brings the musician nearer. Sometimes the music is gay, sometimes ominous. At last Judge and Isbel see the musician in a sunny landscape below the tower in which they stand.

He sat motionless, facing the valley, with his back to the house... Only his head, the upper half of his back and one outstretched leg were visible; but the leg was encased in a sage-green trouser, tightly cross-gartered with yellow straps, the garment on his back resembled, as far as could be seen a purple smock, and the hair of his hatless head fell in a thick, bright yellow mane as far as his shoulders.²⁵

²³ *The Haunted Woman* (London, 1947), p.50. First published London, 1922. All quotations from 1947 edition.

²⁴ *The Haunted Woman*, p.127.

²⁵ *The Haunted Woman*, p.137.

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Finally, Isbel, having broken with Judge, is walking in the rainy, autumn garden of the house when she meets him unexpectedly. After some conversation, in which they are plainly at cross-purposes, Judge says:

"Tell me where you think your are?"

"I have already told you. It is *your* manner which is so very singular, Mr. Judge. Are you quite well?"

"Listen! I am talking with you here, and I am where we wished to be yesterday. Does it not seem so to you?"

"I don't understand you. Where did we wish to be yesterday?"

He gave her another searching look. "So you really are seeing differently. And have you not been up the staircase today?"

"I haven't set foot inside your house, I tell you. Have you lost your senses?"

"No; but I *have* been up that staircase today, and I have not yet come down again."

"Oh, my God!" said Isbel quietly.

"I was wretched, and could not keep away from the house. It contained all my memories. The stairs were there; I climbed them. Passing straight into that other room, I got through the window, and succeeded in reaching the ground without accident, though it was not easy . . ."

She stared at him with frightened eyes. "And where are you now?"

"I am standing beside you in the open countryside in full sunshine — and it is spring, not autumn."²⁶

Judge leaves her and she finds herself in a beautiful spring landscape. The house is gone.

Her mood was one of unutterable excitement and reckless audacity; she appeared to herself to be laughing and sobbing under her breath

Henry and that other man were facing each other on the hillside, a little way below her. The man was tall and stout, and, in his bright-coloured, archaic garments, cut an extraordinary figure. He held his instrument against his chest, and was in the act of drawing his bow across it — the note she had heard had not yet come to an end. His back was turned towards her, so that she could not see his face, but Henry, who was standing erect and motionless beyond, was looking right into it, and, from his expression, it was as though he were beholding an appalling vision

At that moment it seemed to her that yonder strange man was the centre around which everything in the landscape was moving, and that she herself was no more than his *dream*!²⁷

Henry Judge sinks to the ground, and Isbel faints. Judge is later found dead in the east room.

Despite the rather stilted dialogue there seems to me no doubt that the power comes through.

²⁶ *The Haunted Woman*, pp.160-161.

²⁷ *The Haunted Woman*, p.167.

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In *The Haunted Woman*, *The Sphinx* and *The Violet Apple* (unpublished) Lindsay deals again and again with the nature of man and woman and contrasts the illusory world of conventional material life with the real world in which human significance is revealed. He says in his notebook:

One must regard the world not merely as a home of illusions, but as being *rotten* with illusion from top to bottom The most sacred and holy things ought not to be taken for granted, for if examined attentively, they will be found as hollow and empty as the rest Behind this sham world lies the real, tremendous and awful Muspel-world, which knows neither will, nor Unity, nor Individuals: that is to say, an inconceivable world.²⁸

The focal character in *The Sphinx* is Lore, a cynical, enigmatic woman composer.

She writes pretty-pretty music, has a whole host of flabby worshippers in all parts of the country — in short, is fully conscious which side her bread is buttered on, and has gauged public taste to a hair, while all the time and in reality she drinks like a fish, habitually swallows drugs and in town never contemplates the possibility of bed before three or four in the morning.²⁹

This woman herself says: "It's all very well for superior persons to insist on pure art, as opposed to money-making, but, in the meantime, who is to provide an artist's bread and butter?"³⁰

The main male character, Nicholas, has invented an instrument for recording dreams. (It's typical of Lindsay's indifference to the mundane in these affairs that it appears to be made of clockwork.) "I think, that as long as the soul is present the body is alive, and when it leaves the body we die at once When the soul retires inside the intellectual part of the brain system, and leaves the locomotive and sensitive parts to themselves, to allow them to recover from their exhaustion, what happens is . . . what I want to ascertain."³¹ Throughout the book the powerful, prophetic dreams enrich and balance the willed action. Finally, Lore is drowned, and a dream of Nicholas's shows her, transformed, after death: "Quickly and unexpectedly Lore stepped, rather than jumped, up through mists and screens into a free, pure atmosphere of a light, fresh, open world."³² Nicholas dies in his sleep and the dream record shows him embracing Lore. Significantly, in the waking action of the book, it was other women to whom he found himself attracted.

Lindsay comes nearer in *The Sphinx* than any other book to being at home with naturalistic dialogue and normal human interchange.

²⁸ "Sketch Notes."

²⁹ *The Sphinx* (London, 1923), p.62.

³⁰ *The Sphinx*, p.71.

³¹ *The Sphinx*, p.84.

³² *The Sphinx*, p.311.

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"You haven't bored me at all. It has been very interesting."

"Interesting!" She appealed to the others. "He calls it interesting! It's a rather useful expression, and I'll make a note of it."³³

* * *

"I'm utterly fed-up with his everlasting glittering eyes and dapper moustache. He has fairly got entangled with my nervous system. I want a complete rest."³⁴

This vitality is present chiefly in the character of Lore. Elsewhere the narrative writing is careful, detailed, and a little wooden. The book contains so many facets and ambiguities that it would bear considerable weight of reflection.

Lindsay returns in *The Violet Apple*³⁵ to the theme that polite, conventional life, with its emotions at whatever depth, does not touch reality, which is revealed only in enigmatic signals that usually remain unheeded. This is continually related to his sense of the meaning of a true relationship between man and woman. The book has a freshness, simplicity and clarity of outline that give it mysterious depth under a deceptively quiet surface.

There was a long silence before the ambitious *Devil's Tor* was published in 1932. This book is a solid attempt to construct a fictional building which will show forth a whole view of the nature of human significance. It is again about the necessary uniting of a man and a woman through miraculous intervention to alter the course of history. The attempt is too deliberate, the miraculous intervention too insistent and heavy. The book has a stodgy feel. The light and vitality of *Arcturus*, *The Sphinx* and even *The Violet Apple* have gone. The vision is there, but less fiery. It fails to uplift the mass. There are more ideas, fewer insights, and these ideas are incorporated in a story based upon an intricate movement of fate to a given end. This notion of the pressing of a necessary fate is so much more suety and depressing than the tonic vigour or the Arcturan vision of Nightspore's *choice* on the beleagured Muspel tower, that one can see it as the work of a man himself depressed. The dialogue loses in conviction without gaining in nobility and force. Instead of showing the reader, he lectures. The less real *this* world becomes in fiction, the less real the *other* world becomes also. The one must shine through the other, as in his earlier books it often does. This decline seems to me the inevitable result of Lindsay's feeling that no one was genuinely interested in what he was trying to say.

And yet, as always, there are powerful penetrations and, in particular, descriptions of mysterious music which make one long to hear the music

³³ *The Sphinx*, p.92.

³⁴ *The Sphinx*, p.103.

³⁵ "The Violet Apple." This book was completed in 1924 but never published.

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Lindsay himself might have written had composing been his gift. In no book does music fail to play a significant part. Somewhere he says: "Music is the higher speech; so that if truly there are angels and they converse with one another, it must be in music . . ."

And the theme bearing along these tones upon its back — its progress was not in *time*, but in some other incomprehensible mode of change from state to state. Its line of advancing was not between a full past and an empty future, carrying them listening upon its constant front: but they were carried by it — feeling, more than listening — towards another kind of future, already full, though this music was helping to fill it. Therefore the perpetual filling should be of intensity not substance.

These individual tones — to Ingrid, like the dropping of souls — instead of running one upon the heels of another and vanishing at the moment of their sounding, were somehow joining themselves to and increasing the next tones following . . . wherefrom only the softening by the glass made it far more beautiful. The foreground of shadowy garden was invisible except as an imaginary perspective. I repeated the attempt at the next window along the front, but again the same thing happened; I could make out nothing but the reflected trees. Then, since I could hardly undertake the circuit of the house, I gave it up. So small my curiosity had been after all, that I remained standing yet a little while to admire the fascination of wonder given back by this new glass world . . .

Now, all at once, in that mirror of the window, I became aware of a man's dark standing shape against the hollow trunk of a dead tree . . .

His elbow rested lightly on a remaining low dead branch of the tree, the feet were crossed, the face, though it was towards me, I couldn't distinguish, because it was in rather heavy shade, and some way off. His shape was abnormally thin and exaggeratedly tall. He was in dark, tight clothes . . .

And thereupon, of their own will, came scurrying through my head a medley of illustrative superhuman figures . . . any imaginable caricature of the human male form, the most lean and long and travesty-like, that nevertheless should excite a feeling stranger than laughter. Wasn't this mirrored idler in a wood, resting against a death-touched tree, as inauspicious there as a shadow of death itself? . . .

Twice, thrice and more I compared the true and the imaged woodlands to resolve the paradox. So slowly the truth dawned on me; and yet by cool and simple notice I could have grasped it in the beginning. For this presumed reflected vision of trees behind me, beyond the lane, was actually the direct view of different trees seen through the house, the background of its invisible garden. An extraordinary scene was reaching me through opposite windows of the front and back of the house — there was no impediment that couldn't be explained. These lower rooms ran from back to front, or else doors stood open between. Nothing of the inside of the house was visible, because its gloom was quite overpowered by the brightness beyond. The glass panes, the interior dusk, softened the scene to the likeness of a reflection. Only I should have seen immediately how the sinking sun in the west was shining through the trees, not on them.

If the vision of that man was intended for me, my mistake didn't go for nothing . . . I was to see neither a house nor the world, but only a human phantom in its setting . . . A startling recoil from optical illusion to optical

[181]

ERRATUM: Page 181, line 15, from "only the softening . . ."

TO

Page 182, line 6, "... dead tree again, but"

should be read *after* page 182, line 24, "as reality,"

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illusion was to impel me with violence past the common sight. That I was disporting myself with no mirror...but unwittingly steadfastly beholding existence itself — the transition was to supply my mind with the momentum which should easily carry it on to receive the supernatural...

It was a phantom...for already its humanity was gone. With no difficulty, my eyes always found the dead tree again, but there was no light heartless stepping from one corpse to another of sound until the last corps should be reached and straightway forgotten, and all should be forgotten, as in the music of the world: but always there arrived, never again to depart, this grander and grander intensity of emotion, compounded of all the past...³⁶

When he wrote *The Witch* he was ill, deeply discouraged by the advent of the war, and had become silent and withdrawn, feeling less need than ever to relate his work to the normal life of his readers. The book is probably unpublishable, being written with an obsessive concentration on a series of speeches by an Earth-Mother figure who speaks in a strange, stilted, archaic rhetoric quite at variance with the forceful utterance of the people in *A Voyage to Arcturus*. There is an equally obsessive solemnity of tone which makes some of the dialogue unintentionally comic. And yet, as always, magnificence, vision and power break triumphantly through again and again and illuminate all that surround them.

The room I tried to see into was large, but the bright reflection in the window-glass of the sun-dappled tree behind me, across the lane, prevented my distinguishing anything whatever inside. The image of the trees was as vivid as reality, not any longer was there a man beside it; yet where he had been remained. A black gap, a fissure of darkness, occupied exactly his remembered outline. That, however, had been a man, this was a cleft. A cleft in what? I don't know....

....I was too quickly to discover that the gap wasn't opened before me in innocence. Intolerable, sightless waves from it were making nothing of the house between, in ever faster reducing my spirit to the colour of death. I mean, death in its positive character: the odour, taste, sadness of death — its utter joylessness and loneliness, the awful falling of the shadows of night... So death swept me... until step by step, backwards, I must have retreated to the lane...³⁷

Everything that David Lindsay wrote is the work of a man who cannot help but see what others do not, the true nature of what he calls "the vast shadow-house of earth and sky." To find an individual Scottish novel comparable with *A Voyage to Arcturus* in force and strangeness — and it is in no way comparable in depth and scope — you would have to go back as far as *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. It is odd that the most extraordinary Scottish novelist of this century should have been so neglected.

BILLES DON, LEICESTER

³⁶ *Devil's Tor*, pp.470-471.

³⁷ "The Witch." Typescript; unpublished.